

## Supreme M 311

### Chapter 311 Escape Part 2

"Did someone enslave you in the past?" Phloria felt her heart tighten at the idea.

"No, but every constable has to train against such devices to let their colleagues know about their predicament at their first meeting. Enough talking, listen to my words and do it carefully." Jirni grabbed Phloria's shoulders looking her in the eyes.

"Once we are out there, attack to kill. At this point, it's too late to save any of them."

"Aren't they victims? Just like her?" Phloria was having a hard time adapting at the circumstances.

"No, dear. They were ready to enslave people. They are as bad as Nalear is." Jirni shook her head.

"Also, if you show any mercy, they will not return you the favor. You heard her command, they'll kill us even if it costs them their lives. You have no idea what wearing one of those things feels like.

"You became a stranger in your own body, forced to do whatever the owner of the master ring wants. Most victims of a slave item commit suicide within a year from their rescue. It's like being r\*ped in the mind and the body, every single moment."

Phloria unsheathed her estoc, taking a deep breath while thinking about her family and Lith. She hoped they would give her the strength to do what had to be done.

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The mayhem taking place in the corridors soon turned the academy into a warzone. No one could be trusted, fear and paranoia made even the non mind controlled students attack anyone on sight.

There were more spells flying in the air than rice at a wedding ceremony. Solus didn't stop to watch at all the acts of violence, yet every one of the crimes she witnessed reinforced her hatred.

Stopping Nalear wasn't enough, Solus wanted to kill her.

Solus was getting more desperate by the second. She hadn't much mana left and still couldn't find any trace of Lith. Soon, she would be forced to trade her own memories to obtain the power she needed to keep moving.

'How can I sacrifice even one of them?' She inwardly cried.

'What if I choose the wrong one and become another person? What if I forget the reason why I'm even moving? By my maker, where the heck is he?'

She could still bond to another person, but it would mean losing him forever and giving someone access to all their secrets and most private moments. Solus would rather die than betray their bond.

When it happened, she couldn't believe her own fourteen senses. Solus could finally pick up an aura that she would recognize among thousands. Lith was just a few hundred meters in front of her.

She let go of the ceiling while casting their personal flight spell, soaring through the air like a small meteor. Solus felt so happy, so relieved to forget about everything else. Her other half was so close she could almost feel his touch again.

Alas, that cost her everything.

"Where do you think you are going, little one?" Nalear's cruel voice shattered Solus's hopes. Her spirit magic stopped Solus in mid air, pulling her toward the Professor's open palm.

"Who would have thought I would find you while looking for that damn constable? Heavens sure are on my side today." Even if she had been at her peak condition, Solus wouldn't have the strength to escape her pull.

She offered no resistance, letting herself be reeled in like an exhausted fish.

'F\*ck the heavens and f\*ck you a hundred times over!' Solus thought.

The moment before Nalear's pure mana could solidify enough to block her movements, Solus revealed her trump card.

She opened her pocket dimension, using spirit magic to unleash on the bewildered Professor every single weapon that Lith had Forgemastered and alchemical tool she had realized.

They were all medium low quality items, each one would have negligible effects on someone of Nalear's caliber. Their sheer numbers, however, were a force to be reckoned with.

"Where the f\*ck all this stuff comes from?" Nalear's hate for the magical crafting arts knew no bounds that day.

Exploiting her enemy's distraction, Solus assumed the form of a snake, biting Nalear with all her strength. She still had the sample of Balkor's venom in its purest form. Solus pumped it all in the Professor's bloodstream, just to be safe.

The numbing sensation quickly spread through her hand, triggering Nalear into a panic. She had almost died once from the venom to keep her cover during Balkor's attack. Nalear knew she had no time to lose. If the poison reached her core she would die.

Also, she was no Healer. Nalear didn't have any mean to extract the venom aside from Invigoration, but it was hard to focus on a respiration technique while deadly blades and energy blasts were raining on her.

Solus turned tail, searching for Lith's energy signature again. Luckily, he hadn't gotten far, she still had enough energy to reach him. Solus flew as fast as she could, even resorting to employ her distress signal.

The one that had brought them to meet so many years prior. Anyone in the academy could hear it, but Solus didn't care. She wanted to get his attention before it was too late.

Yet it was a quarter past late. Nalear Warped in front of her, clutching her tight with an iron glove surrounded by a mystical aura.

"Damn Forgemasters. Can't live with them, can't live without them." Nalear spat in disgust. She had managed to move so fast only by employing the barrier built in Wanemyre's masterpiece while using Invigoration to expel the venom.

It was one of her strongest artifacts, along with the glove she was currently wearing.

"Thanks for making it easier to find you, stupid piece of rock." Nalear sneered.

"Indeed." Said a voice from another Warp Steps, shutting her mouth with a fist that sent Nalear tumbling on the ground for several meters despite the barrier shielding her.

Solus escaped her grip just for a split second before finding her into another one.

The contact triggered the bonding, making them whole again. For Solus, it was like being able to breathe again after almost drowning. For Lith, it was like seeing the sun at the end of an endless winter.

They became one, their minds fused in joy and hatred, allowing their cores to beat as one. Solus covered his hand, but this time it wasn't a glove.

The gauntlet covered Lith's arm up until the elbow. Its fingers ended in razor sharp claws and small blades came out from its ulna.

The gemstone resting on its center wasn't yellow anymore, but of a deep shade of green.

A split second later, the Gatekeeper sword was back in Lith's hand and the Skinwalker armor replaced the shroud.

Lith didn't waste time asking himself how it was possible nor losing himself in Solus's warm embrace. Not like she would allow him anyway.

They were one, which meant they shared their every thought, including the burning desire to kill Nalear.

## Chapter 312 Traitor Part 1

Nalear's own words echoed in her head, but now they sounded more sarcastic than triumphant.

'Like heck the heavens are on my side. What's happening here?'

The entire world seemed to have turned upside down in less than a minute.

Lith's corpse was supposed to be hung to a wall, yet he was jumping with the bastard sword aimed at her neck. He was also wearing the Skinwalker armor that until a moment ago she was certain it was safe inside her dimensional amulet.

Nalear had no way to know Lith and Solus shared a pocket dimension and thus the dimensional amulet he always carried around was merely a decoy. After Lith had lost consciousness, Solus had stored away the Gatekeeper, making it appear as it was Lith's final act before fainting.

When Nalear had taken away the rest of his equipment, Solus had bid her time, letting her store away the magical rings while mana sense allowed her to study the timing with which Nalear opened her dimensional space.

The moment Solus saw with mana sense the glow preceding the opening of the dimensional rift, she had recovered the Skinwalker armor just a split second before it could be stolen.

Nalear never bothered checking her loot because until Lith was alive, the magical items would bear his imprint, making it impossible for anyone else to use them.

The Professor was shocked by the sudden turn of events, yet she managed to activate the barrier in time, blocking Lith's first attack without a scratch. She still felt the impact, realizing that his strength was above hers.

'This doesn't make any sense. I Awakened almost nine years ago while he can't be Awakened from more than six years. It can't be just because he is a man. It doesn't matter. He is still just a student while I practiced magic for almost twenty years.'

'While he spent the whole night getting stabbed, I had a good sleep. Whatever that stupid piece of stone does I still hold all the advantages!'

Nalear's reasoning wasn't wrong, but it wasn't entirely right either. Having graduated from the academy seven years prior, she indeed had a stronger core and more experience with using high level true magic.

However, Lith had a stronger body, all the knowledge from his previous life, and a rich combat experience. Not to mention that fighting Linjos and patching up Wanemyre had already cost her quite some energy, while Lith partially recovered from feeding on her little lambs' life force.

Nalear infused herself with air, fire, and earth magic, intercepting Lith's sword with her own. The impact made her slid a few meters backward, almost making her lose the grip on the weapon.

"What the f\*ck are you?" Nalear extended her left hand, pointing the iron glove against him. A series of shockwaves struck Lith, like several cars were ramming against him one after the other.

Solus used her spirit magic to create a force field while Lith used his own air magic to disrupt the attack, making it lose part of its strength. Yet the remaining force was enough to make him crash against a wall, bleeding from his mouth and nostrils.

'F\*ck! It's the first time I fight an Awakened with this much experience. Magical beasts were always limited to two elements while the Clacker Queen was as inexperienced as Protector.

'In a battle between Awakened ones, experience and equipment can easily turn the tables. I have yet to create a single damn tier five spell!' He thought.

'Do you think we should retreat?' Solus didn't like the idea one bit. She wanted Nalear to suffer an agonizing death, but the short exchange had shown her a gap between the two that fury alone couldn't overcome.

They needed a plan, a diversion, or both.

'No way.' Lith replied. 'The vision showed me someone capable of killing the Queen's corps before slaughtering my family. I bet we are staring at her.'

A couple of Nalear's little lambs joined the fray, showering Lith with a torrent of fire and lightning respectively. He kicked the wall behind him, managing to dodge both the attacks by jumping above them.

He impaled the students with the darkness imbued Gatekeeper, sucking away their life forces to restore his own. Nalear used the split second of distraction to Blink behind his back and decapitate Lith with a horizontal slash.

Or so she planned. This time Lith was ready. Just like her, he was silently weaving spell after spell from the moment they had met. Her blade struck Solus's spirit magic force field which made it lose momentum, allowing Lith to briefly touch her weapon.

His hand released a small but powerful globular lightning that traveled through the metal bypassing all of her protections. Thanks to earth fusion, Nalear managed to avoid the brunt of the damage.

Yet the moment the spell struck, it stopped her movements long enough to put her on the back foot again.

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Yurial had yet to recover from the shocking news Phloria told him about when all hell broke loose. The door of his room opened, letting two students in. With the academy's power core down, the locks had stopped working.

Yurial knew the invaders pretty well. One was Lyam Lukart's cousin, a brawny fifteen year old boy. The other was a very cute girl he dated the previous year.

"You'll pay for what you did to the Lukart family, Deirus!" The boy said unleashing a fireball from one of his rings.

"How could you play with my feelings and toss me away like garbage? You said you loved me!" The girl conjured a swarm of small ice blades. They were all aimed to Yurial's nether regions.

Luckily, Yurial had taken Lith's vision very seriously. He had stockpiled his dimensional amulet with the best tools money could afford. Arrays were too slow to cast and healing magic dealt no damage. Since his specializations were useless in case of ambush, he could only be prepared for the worst.

The moment he realized the danger he was in, Yurial Blinked twice. The first moved him behind his assailants, leaving a Fire Seed at their feet, while the second brought him outside the room, just in time to close the door behind himself.

The three fireballs exploded almost at the same time, making the walls tremble.

'I know you probably were out of your minds, but I really want to live. I'm sorry I'm not a fighter good enough to have the luxury of mercy.' He inwardly prayed for their souls.

Yurial could hear terrible screams, some of pain, other desperately calling for help. He felt terrible ignoring them, but he did it nonetheless. After finding an isolated corner, Yurial opened a Warp Steps to the arranged meeting point.

He didn't immediately cross it. Yurial simply used it to peek if someone else was already there. It was only when he spotted Friya and Quylla that Yurial moved to the other side, happy to see again his loyal friends.

Friya was deadly pale. The rapier in her hand was dripping with fresh blood and her clothes were tore in multiple points. Quylla was doing her best to hold back the tears, clenching her knife with so much strength her hand was white.

## Chapter 313 Traitor Part 2

As soon as they saw Yurial, they immediately pointed their blades at him.

"What the heck is wrong with you?" Yurial managed to stop at the last second before getting stabbed.

Seeing surprise instead of lust in his eyes, Freya sighed in relief.

"Didn't you hear that crazy b\*tch command? I almost got r\*ped thrice in the last five minutes. If it wasn't for Quylla I would be already dead, or worse."

Both the girls had Warped to the destination as soon as Jirni contacted them, trying to keep themselves out of sight and out of troubles. What they didn't expect was for every single mind controlled boy to recklessly converge on Friya on sight.

Her biggest mistake had been using a spell to kill the first assailant. The noise had revealed her position, multiplying the number of enemies. They had kept warping and fighting until that moment, managing to survive only because they wanted her body intact and because they completely ignored Quylla.

She had never been so happy for not being very attractive.

Phloria, Jirni, and Orion Warped there too a few seconds later. Aside from Jirni, they were all deadly pale and covered in blood.

"Glad to see you are all right, girls." Jirni checked her daughters and husband, almost ignoring Yurial.

"It's the only piece of good news so far. The power core is down and so are the Warp Gates leading here. It will take a while for the reinforcements to get here. I'm afraid when they arrive it will be already too late. I contacted Manohar on the way here.

He says they have their hands full treating wounded students and neutralizing the Professors under Nalear's influence. Trust no one. Anyone here could be an enemy."

They all nodded in unison.

"We have only two options run to the forest and get ourselves to safety or find Nalear and kill her. If she dies, all those under the influence of a slave ring will be freed."

"No, there is a third option." Orion chimed in. "The kids save themselves by hiding in the forest while we stop that madwoman."

"Don't go, please." Quylla sobbed desperately. "I don't want to lose my family again. Please, don't leave me."

Jirni hugged Quylla, trying to calm her down.

"We'll never leave you alone, darling. Our duty is..." Jirni stopped her eyes wide in surprise.

Quylla's blade had pierced her lung and heart, striking from the blind spot created in the stomach area when Jirni embraced her. There was a reason if Quylla had ignored Nalear's final command. Her duty was getting rid of constable Ernas all along.

After Lith, Nalear considered Jirni the biggest threat to her plan. She had come too close to the truth too many times. Nalear knew that the only way to kill someone so meticulous was to exploit her only weak spot. Jirni's love for her family.

While everyone was still too shocked to react, Quylla Blinked behind Yurial's back, cutting his throat from ear to ear. Blood spurted everywhere, blinding Phloria and Friya while Orion attempted to save his wife.

Quylla Blinked again, this time going for Friya's life. Nalear had given her precise orders. To make sure Jirni was beyond saving, Quylla had to kill all the Healers.

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Lith pressed the advantage by activating his tier four true magic spell Burning Prison. Six fireballs appeared at the same time around Nalear, one above, one below and the others in a square shape. The fireballs exploded simultaneously, one reinforcing the effect of the other.

It was the same tactic Nalear had employed in her ambush and now it was Lith's turn to exploit the spell's nature to predict her next move. If she used ice to counter the fire, he would use lightning. If she Blinked, he would follow suit, stabbing her the moment Nalear reappeared.

Thanks to Life Vision, an Awakened one could see the exit point of a Blink, making the first one to employ such spell an easy target. Yet she did neither. Nalear activated once again her sword's barrier, using it to take the brunt of the damage.

It was one of Lith's best spells, yet she came out of it almost unscathed.

Almost.

Lith bolted forward boosted by air fusion, but Nalear was ready for him. With an upwards swing of her sword, while she was still in a crouched position, she managed to deflect the Gatekeeper and aim for his right arm at the same time.

There was no time to adjust his stance, Lith could only let go of the blade to prevent his limb from being cut off. Nalear smiled in triumph, aiming to Lith's head next.

That until she saw the Gatekeeper plunging from the air as quick as a bullet toward her heart. Only then she noticed Lith's right hand was bare, the gauntlet was gone. Cursing at herself for falling into such stupid trap, Nalear blocked the falling blade, leaving her side exposed in the process.

Lith punched her in the ribs with all his strength, cracking three of them. His aim was to break the ribs and use them to puncture her lung, but Nalear managed to fly backward at the last second reducing the damage.

'Damn! At least she took a solid hit. Sooner or later she will have to use Invigoration and that will be my only chance to take her out.' Lith thought.

Alas, Nalear was well aware of such a possibility as well.

Solus returned to Lith's hand, who was flying towards the enemy at full speed to not give her a single moment of rest.

Thorman, the Professor of the Mage Knight specialization, flew against Lith enveloped in a sphere composed by conjured shields which rotated at high speed. It was the tier five Mage Knight spell Revolving Fortress.

Lith cursed when Solus pointed out the Professor was wearing a slave item too. Now that they were activated, she only needed a glance to recognize them. Lith attempted to dodge, but the shields broke the formation barring his way.

At the same time, Professor Binlow of the Mage Knight class unleashed against him several armor shaped constructs. Each one was armed to the teeth but frail. Lith needed only a few slashes to wipe out shields and construct alike, but it gave Nalear the time to get back at her peak condition.

Binlow sent a pulse of mana, allowing the constructs from his tier five Personal Army spell to repair all the damage they had sustained.

"Sorry, Lith." Said Nalear with a smug expression.

"You are not the only one who has brought friends to the party."

Chapter 314 Traitor Part 3

Going toe to toe with an Awakened one who possessed a stronger mana core and was more experienced with magic had already pushed Lith to his limits just to keep up. Even with his core and Solus's resonating, he was barely at the cyan upper stages, while Nalear had a blue core.

Now that he had to face her along two other Professors, Lith felt his heart sink. He had long learned not to underestimate fake mages. The only advantage he had against stronger mages was usually the surprise effect, but Nalear countered that.

There was nothing he could do that she couldn't, making his odds of victory non-existent.

'Damn! If I put my life on the line, I can kill one of the Professors, maybe both. Not Nalear, thought. She can always use them as meat shields to buy time and recover.' Lith thought.

'Should we run away?' Solus hated not being strong enough to help him. Reality was a harsh mistress, all her battle spirit meant nothing in the face of true power. It was better to survive to fight another day.

'Exposing our back? No, thanks. A tactical retreat may help, though. Divide and conquer. If I manage to fight them one by one, we can still do it.'

'It's a big if.' Solus was worried, the three Professors were all casting something big.

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Meanwhile, Jirni and Yurial were quickly bleeding out.

Orion was using all his medical skills in an attempt to save them. He forced Jirni to drink top class healing potions while he used magic on Yurial's neck. Neither seemed to work well.

"Her organs are too damaged. She needs tier four magic." His wife was dying in his arms, but Orion managed to keep his emotions in check, assessing the situation.

"Yurial too is in a bad shape. The wound is too wide and is sapping his life force very fast. We need a Healer, fast!"

Phloria felt the ground crumbling under her feet. Her whole life was going down the gutter and there was nothing she could do about it.

'Why didn't I learn healing magic too? Is my mom going to die because I didn't push myself hard enough?' She thought. The truth was she never showed particular talent toward healing magic.

The academy was a demanding environment, so Phloria had applied to the Mage Knight specialization only to not waste her energies. Even if she did try the Healer specialization, she would have flunked after the first trimester.

It was just her helplessness talking, filling her mind with "ifs" and "buts" about what she could have done in the past to have control over an uncontrollable present.

Instead of despairing, Phloria activated Full Guard before Yurial's body could even hit the ground, quickly moving near Friya. Nalear plan was the basic of the basic: always get rid of the Healer first.

Since Lith had told her about his vision, she had practiced Full Guard relentlessly, even creating a better version of it. The moment Phloria touched Friya, the blue aura expanding from her body enveloped her sister too, allowing Phloria to share her multi sensory awareness of the space in a two meters radius around them.



Contrary to everyone's expectations, Quylla didn't strike immediately, retreating to a safe distance instead.

"She wants to prevent us from receiving help." Phloria understood what was happening. "Friya, go save mom. Now!"

Friya was still frozen in place. She had no idea what to do. She could only save one of them. The situation forced her to take an impossible choice. Phloria's order nudged the balance in Jirni's favor.

"Dad, give Friya some space and call Manohar. We need all the help we can get. I'll keep Yurial alive."

Orion nodded, understanding his daughter's plan. It was unlikely for Manohar, or anyone else for that matter, to have the time and the strength to help them. Moving them while in critical condition was also out of the question.

It was only a trap to trigger Nalear's orders.

'Quylla is a Healer too. If we snap her out of the slave item control, we can save them both. My little Flower has grown into a capable leader.' He thought.

Quylla Blinked, appearing at Friya's back only to find Phloria waiting for her. She struck Quylla's throat with her extended fingers, preventing her from spellcasting without doing her any real harm.

Only then she grabbed Quylla by the arm, twisting it into a submission hold and forcing her face down on the ground.

"Dad, search for a ring, a bracelet. Anything! If it's on the neck we're doomed."

Quylla struggled like a mad beast, but Phloria was taller, stronger, and ruthless. She pushed her full weight on the knee pressed against Quylla's back to keep her pinned on the floor.

Orion took off Quylla's rings one by one until he found one that couldn't be moved. A quick spell later, he knew what he was dealing with.

'It's the same model that Poltus guy purchased. Finally some good news.' Orion took out a tool looking like pincer clamps from his dimensional amulet, using it to grab Quylla's ring. He then channeled a Forgemaster spell that temporarily neutralized the slave item, allowing his daughter to regain her free will.

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Amyla Farg had done her best, saving as many students as she could and bringing them to safety. The chaos and violence were overwhelming. Despite her efforts, she felt like she was trying to stop the tide using a spoon.

The mind controlled students would either Warp away from her or attack innocents, forcing her to defend them while they got away and found another victim.

She was starting to fear everything was lost when the artifact Tyrus had entrusted to her picked Lith's signal again.

'Thank the gods he hasn't run away, yet. If I can convince him to help me, maybe together we stand a chance.' Professor Farg chose to fly instead of Warping, she had already consumed part of her mana trying to stop the disorders.

The scene at her arrival made even too much sense. Three Professors against one student, keeping him on the defensive. Farg recognized the crazed look in her colleagues' eyes. The thought of how deep the scheme was made her shiver.

It didn't take her much time to understand Nalear was in control of the slave rings. Cursing at the Kingdom's bad luck, she unleashed three tier four true spells, one for each target.

Sunray generated a white hot beam aimed at Nalear's back. Stormclaw conjured a small tornado which released wind blades in all directions. Lastly, Thundersnap released a chain of lightning that engulfed the whole corridor.

Farg would have replaced Thundersnap with an earth based spell, to maximize the destructive power of her combo, but inside the academy there was no earth to manipulate. The stones composing the castle were resistant to magic, even with the power core offline.

"Watch out!" Nalear warned her minions who otherwise would have no regard for their personal safety. The three spells converged a few meters in front of them, causing a chain reaction.

Stormclaw absorbed the massive heat from Sunray, exploding outwards in a massive fire pillar releasing scorching shockwaves while Thundersnap bounced off the walls, attacking the Professors from all sides.

#### Chapter 315 Traitor Part 4

Thorman used his conjured tower shields to block the whole corridor and Binlow hastily activated a spell from one of his rings to conjure an ice wall one meter (3.3 feet) thick to stop the blast.

Lith could have used the diversion to escape, but charged forward instead. He imbued the Gatekeeper with water magic to conjure a cold aura and himself with earth magic. The combined effects were supposed to protect him from the brunt of the damage.

The fire pillar crushed the shields and melted the ice, yet it still had enough power to turn Binlow's constructs into gas. Nalear gritted her teeth, activating once again the magic shield of her sword while her minions conjured more protections.

Lith struck them from behind with the Gatekeeper, overloading Nalear's sword core and interrupting the Professor's spells. The barrier shattered and the explosion engulfed the four of them, but Lith made sure to stand right behind Nalear.

With the barrier down, she could either protect herself from the blast or from him, but not from both. She would also become his human shield, making it a trade worth Lith's while. Lith released all the spells he had ready, only to see them crushed by Nalear's glove.

Its magic could be used as a sword but also as a shield.

Then, the blast struck them and the four mages were slammed against the walls. As soon as the smoke dissipated, the corridor was peaceful again. Farg was satisfied with the results of her sneak attack. Every enemy was down and accounted for.

There was just one thing that didn't add up.

"Why didn't you run away?" She asked Lith. "Throwing yourself in the middle of my spell was incredibly dumb. You could have di..."

Despite Solus's force field and light fusion, Lith's ears were still ringing. Solus had no such problem allowing him to understand what was happening and cut Farg short.

"Don't let her recover, you idiot! She's the mastermind!" Lith pointed at Nalear's body.

Only then Farg reactivated Life Vision, noticing that Lith and Nalear both were getting stronger by the second, their wounds closing at a speed visible at the naked eye.

'Another Awakened one? This is a nightmare!' Farg unleashed all the spells she had left, but it was too little and too late.

Nalear raised her iron glove, hitting Farg with a series of shockwaves which crushed her attacks and sent Farg sprawling on the floor, bleeding from the nose, ears, and mouth.

"Seems it's just the two of us again, dear Lith." Nalear smiled without stopping to use Invigoration. Lith was still sitting on the floor, clearly the blast had somehow dealt him more damage than she had expected.

Lith took a deep breath. Talking was cheap while spells spoke loudly.

"Arise." He carefully avoided breaking his use of Invigoration, while all the fallen one rose on their feet to serve their master.

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As soon as Quylla was freed from the slave ring, her mind collapsed under the weight of her actions. Ever since the previous weekend, her life had turned into a nightmare. The moment she wore the ring, she had been under Nalear's thumb.

She had fought the ring's influence the whole time. Yet her struggle didn't prevent her from feeling Jirni's blood and guts cover her hands nor Yurial's flesh tear up like paper under the enchanted blade.

Quylla stopped struggling. She broke into tears while desperately trying to apologize.

Meanwhile, Friya was already deadly pale. Regenerating Jirni's heart and lungs also required her to share part of her life force to prevent her mother from dying of weakness.

'How the f\*ck does Lith to make it always look so simple?' She inwardly cursed. She was doing alone something that the academy trained her to do with two teams of three persons each.

"Feel free to take my life force." Orion had already done all that he could to stabilize Yurial. Friya thankfully nodded, taking only what she needed to keep her and her mother alive.

Phloria only wanted to hug Quylla tightly, to calm her down and tell her that it wasn't her fault. That everything was going to be all right. Alas, there is no time for kindness in war.

Phloria slapped her instead, hoping to snap her out of it before it was too late.

"Quylla, you are my sister and I know how this is hard on you." She held Quylla's face with both hands, forcing her sister to look her in the eyes.

"Now it's not the time for tears. You must decide how you want to remember this moment. If as the day when you saved your friend's life or the one when you killed your first human."

Quylla nodded her head, choking back the tears and the snot running down her face.

She placed her hands on Yurial, activating her diagnostic spell to understand how deep the damage was.

The spell gave her no reply.

She cast it a second and a third time, before finding the strength to put her hand on his heart. There was no pulse, Yurial was gone.

Quylla stood there for a few seconds, incapable of answering to their expectant looks. She felt something die inside of her. She had betrayed her family, her friends.

'How could I be so stupid to wear an enchanted item without even knowing what it did?' She thought in hindsight. None of the group had ever heard about slave items, otherwise Lith would have warned them.

Even his paranoia could do nothing against what he was unaware of.

Quylla joined Friya, giving her life force to both women to help them to recover.

Phloria and Orion understood what had happened, but there was no time for mourning their loss. They stood guard against the chaos surrounding them, blocking anyone that could threaten the ongoing treatment.

For Orion they were just kids, for Phloria were familiar faces she had seen every day for the past two years. Yet they killed them nonetheless. Only death awaited those who ignored their warning and entered the range of their spells.

Jirni regained her sense, coughing out the blood that had invaded her lungs.

'What happened?' Her mind immediately recalled the events leading to her near death experience.

'The wound was deep, yet I feel good. Too good.' Lady Ernas swiftly struck Quylla's stomach, making her faint and preventing her suicide attempt.

"My poor child, what have they done to you?" Jirni hugged her daughter's small body and kissed her head. Quylla was reduced to a pale husk, her skin was deadly cold.

Jirni stood up, letting her family embrace her. There was relief in their faces and warmth in their touch, but no joy in the reunion. Watching Yurial's corpse, Jirni knew there had never been a chance to save them both.

She could tell by looking at the guilt in Phloria's eyes that it was her taking an impossible decision in the heat of the battle.

'I don't know if Phloria or Quylla will be able to live with what happened today. I can't do anything to change the past. The only thing I can do is to make Phloria's choice matter.'

Following her directives, Friya stored Yurial corpse in her dimensional amulet. They wouldn't let anyone harm him anymore. Then, she had Phloria open a Warp Steps to the forest, to send the girls to safety.

## Chapter 316 Agony Part 1

Friya was too weak to fight and Quylla was barely alive. They would be dead weight in the battle that was still ahead of them.

As soon as they crossed over, Phloria closed the Warp Steps.

"What do you think you are doing?" Orion was shocked.

"I already lost too much today." Phloria's eyes kept weeping, but her voice was steady.

"I'm not going to hide somewhere while you two risk your lives. Mom, dad. I couldn't live with myself if anything happens to you. Not while knowing I could have made a difference. Yurial is dead because of me."

"No, dear." Jirni caressed her shoulder, honoring her daughter's determination.

"Yurial is dead because of Nalear. You didn't make Quylla your slave. You didn't order her to hurt him nor you prevented the arrival of the healers who could have saved him. Let's put an end to this madness."

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Milea Genys, the Magic Empress of the Gorgon Empire, had seen many awful things during her life as both wandering magician and ruler of her country. Yet seeing so many youths turned into beasts and lose their lives was a sight even her found disturbing.

"Leegaain, why did you bring me here? What's the point in watching this massacre and do nothing?" The fight between the two Awakened seemed out of a bard tale. Unlike the three Guardians, Milea couldn't avert her eyes from the bloodshed taking place on all five floors of the White Griffon.

"Because I wanted you to see first hand what was the Gorgon Empire when I left it. One thing is reading history books, another is living it." Leegaain explained.

"If you want to prevent such things from happening again during your rule, you must be brave enough to take unpopular decisions. Avoid grave problems long enough and everything will fester."

"Being a ruler it's not a popularity contest." Salaark snorted. "Those idiots of the Griffon Kingdom achieved such a long peace that they were afraid of the conflict with the noble households. Without conflict, there is no progress."

"They should have thought of the consequences of letting powerful people become even more powerful would have in the long term, instead of prioritizing the status quo. It ended with the Royal family almost losing its dominance."

"It would have caused a civil war that would have lasted years. Remember, powerful people already have all the means they need to protect themselves. If you let them, they'll drain your authority. A stable country requires balance and shared resources."

"Indeed." Tyris nodded. "My only hope is that, just like for Balkor, this bloodshed will bring some real changes. The royals have finally opened their eyes, now it's time for the nobles to see the errors of their way or get condemned by history."

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Nalear was surrounded by undead students who stared at her with looks full of hunger and hatred. Their usually pristine white uniforms were tainted by blood and excrement, releasing a foul stench that would make hard for most people not to puke.

To Nalear it was just another day.

It was the exact same thing she felt every time she watched one of those disgusting stuck up noble kids walk along the corridors of the White Griffon like they owned the place. Nalear had suffered them ever since her first year of academy, back when she was just twelve years.

Her parents were employed as household staff of a minor noble and had been enthusiastic of their daughter becoming a mage. Nalear, not so much. Ever since the academy started, everyone treated her as a servant, not as a peer.

She hoped that with time she would manage to make some friends. That if she tried hard enough, people would see past her lack of a family name and respect her for her hard work.

Reality proved her wrong, turning her hope into despair.

She endured the hazing and the violence, only focusing on her studies. Magic was a fascinating subject, capable of taking her mind off the daily dose of misery. At least until it was night time.

In those hours, she would return to be just a little girl away from home. Nalear was completely alone, resorting even to eat in her room to avoid more "accidents." Most of the time, she would cry herself to sleep.

During the third year, her body bloomed and so did her magical talents. Things started with lecherous looks from the boys and harsh words from the girls, but quickly escalated.

Nalear was often groped while going to classes or before the lessons. Every attempt of self defense would end with her losing points and things getting worse. The Professors blamed her for being unable to fit in while the Headmistress condemned her overreacting over "practical jokes".

It was then that despair turned into hatred. When the academy turned out to be an enemy as much as her molesters were.

After a group of boys dragged her in an isolated room and almost r\*ped her, the Headmistress finally gave her a Guilty Ballot. It wasn't something she could cover up, the wounds on Nalear's body spoke volume.

After healing the girl, Professor Vastor was ready to testify in Nalear's favor. His report would have likely put an end to many careers. It was only by offering a nice sum of money for her parents that the Headmistress managed to keep Nalear quiet.

The academy was still long and her family could use that gold to start a business. Nalear felt safe with the Ballot in hand, so she agreed. Her existence kept being isolated and miserable, but at least now everyone left her alone.

Nalear's hopes had long died, replaced by mistrust.

To never feel helpless again, she chose the Battle and War Mage specializations. Nalear quickly gained the recognition of her new Professors, Rudd included. Her mastery of dimensional magic surpassed even his hostility towards commoners.

Everything went fine until the end of the fourth year when the class went to the mining town to practice with mana crystals. Nalear had forgotten about the danger, of how outside the academy the Ballot was just a round stone.

It happened in the mines. Those who envied her talent, her ranking, or simply lusted for her beauty, ambushed her in a gallery. Their plan was to r\*pe and kill her, disposing of the body in the forest.

Nalear fought back with everything she had. She managed to hurt some of her attackers, triggering their fury. They beat her an inch from death, until out of desperation she used her last ring to strike at a mana crystal, triggering a cave in.

The attackers managed to get away and left her for dead. They had dragged her into an isolated tunnel before she managed to regain consciousness. Deep enough to make sure no one would hear her screams.

They felt reassured when the cave in went unnoticed. They thought her death would be considered an accident.

Nalear survived. She remained there for over a week. Water wasn't a problem thanks to magic, but there was almost nothing to eat. Dimensional magic was blocked by the academy's array, so she had to survive by eating everything she could, even things that would make a goat throw up.

Rage kept her barely alive until she was rescued. After a week, the Professors responsible for her specialization courses got worried and investigated. Both the Headmistress and the Professor in charge of the Mana Crystal subject were fired, but the culprits got away with it for lack of proof.

Nalear spent all the time when she was recovering practicing true magic. Deep in the caves, surrounded by the mana coming out of Mogar, where it was so dense to take crystal form, she had relentlessly attempted to use dimensional magic to escape, until her rage and talent awakened her core.

## Chapter 317 Agony Part 2

Because of the arrays, she couldn't kill her enemies, but now Nalear could ruin their lives. Spirit magic allowed her to make them fail every single subject they attended together. A nudge here, a push there was all it took to make them stutter or disrupt their hand signs.

Their performance during the final exams was so poor not even their parents could avoid their expulsion.

Yet it wasn't enough to quench her thirst for vengeance. She wanted them dead, alongside their families. During her imprisonment, something broke inside of her. As hope died, madness flourished.

Nalear joined the Association as soon as he could, racking merits by accomplishing the impossible over and over again despite her young age. The Crown attempted to recruit her, but she resented them for the academy system.

Nobles and mages alike fawned her, but she only wanted them dead. Her behavior left her alone, with a lot of enemies and no one watching her back. When she tried to convert her merits into titles and lands to put the families of her attackers under her thumb, only faraway lands in backwater regions were offered to her.

With no ally in the Court nor in the Association, no matter how much she achieved, her goals would always be outside of her grasp. She had tried to fight alone against the world and the world crushed her.

'I'm the victim! Why am I the one getting punished?' She thought while her madness and rage grew day by day.

When Linjos offered her a position as a Professor, she thought she could have a fresh start, but even under the naïve, gentle Headmaster things weren't much different from the past.

When Lukart offered her revenge in exchange for her help, Nalear accepted only to act as a double agent. She hated people like Lukart the most. Bringing down him and his associates was an opportunity she couldn't miss.

After seeing how deeply rooted was the rebellion, how mages like Hatorne were willing to sell their own kin for money, Nalear lost all hope and a plan formed in her mind.

Hatorne slave items were a terrible tool. She had managed to fuse Forgemastering and Alchemy to obtain some special pills that allowed to remove the cursed objects while keeping the victims under control.

Thanks to his associates, Lukart always knew when a security check was about to happen and had the slaves using the pills to pass the inspections. Nalear used the first batch of slave items she received on the students instead of her alleged targets, turning Lukart's accomplices inside the academy in her puppets and gaining control of every box that reached the academy.

After helping Lukart escape, he gave her his master ring. Just a second before she killed him and all his family with the tier five spell Raging Sun she had silently cast.

At that point, she had complete control over all of his assets, inside and outside the academies. She finally had the means to achieve her revenge. After capturing Lith, the Awakened one responsible of so many failures, and turning Quylla into an unwilling sleeper agent, Nalear's plan was bound to succeed.

Or at least so she thought, until Farg's unexpected arrival put down her minions, giving Lith the time to rise a small army of undead. Thanks to Life Vision, Nalear could see they were filled to the brim with darkness magic.

They were all lesser undead, nothing compared to Balkor's creations. Yet Nalear felt afraid. In a real battle, a moment of distraction was the difference between life and death.

With a wave of Lith's hand, the undead charged at her in a mad rush.

'It makes sense. He probably wants to stall for time, preventing me to focus while he cast his spells. Lith is using against me the same strategy I employed to capture him.' She inwardly smiled.

'He really is a good student. If only he didn't make friends with the enemy, he could have shared this moment with me. It's really a pity killing him but he left me no choice. He should have never got close to the noble scum.'

Even if its barrier was still offline, Nalear's sword had several tricks up its sleeve. She needed but a thought to unleash part of the power the many mana crystals embedded on it stored. They generated a ice storm that was supposed to repel the wave and buy her enough time to complete her spells.

'There's nothing that Balkor did that I can't.' Lith thought.



With a snap of his fingers, all the undead close to her detonated, releasing a cloud of darkness magic that surrounded her. It negated the ice storm and sapped her strength.

At the same time, the rest of the undead shoot focused beams of dark energy from their eyes, replicating the effects of Lith's Plague Arrow spell. Unlike the Valors' attack, they were still slow and incapable of infecting their victims.

Nalear had no way to know it, she only saw Balkor's minions' attacks unfolding one after the other in front of her eyes, triggering her recent trauma. She went all out, releasing a blue aura while dodging or parrying all the Arrows thanks to air fusion, managing to complete her spell.

Final Sunset was Nalear's version of a tier five Battle Mage spell. It generated around her a globe made of darkness imbued flames that reduced to ashes all the undead that approached her.

Nalear could also consume part of the sphere, turning it into spikes made of black fire to attack her enemies from a distance. The two elements were fused together, allowing even the dark energies to move at a speed normally impossible.

Final Sunset was a perfect offense and defense that would stay up until all its mana was exhausted, but being a true spell Nalear could channel more energy into it at will. As long as she could use Invigoration, she was practically invincible.

She used her hands to better direct the flames, purging the corridor from the undead and the remaining corpses. Nalear wasn't going to underestimate Lith anymore, she now saw all the bodies lying around as potential traps.

Lith had a vague understanding of what was happening, yet he didn't panic. He kept his distance while making all the remaining undead detonate. They would do her no direct harm but they still forced her to consume mana to protect herself.

'It's nice trick, but it's far from perfect. To keep using Invigoration she can't move, making it impossible for her to hit me if I don't get close. Also, Invigoration can't be used for long. The more she uses it, the sooner she'll collapse'

Lith had just finished analysing the enemy's plan's weak spots when Life Vision showed him the exit point of a Blink quickly forming in front of him.

The dimensional fissure had yet to completely open, but the heat coming out of it almost burned his lungs.

'F\*ck! I didn't consider Blink. She can still move without moving. Until that spell is active, I can't even get close to her.' Lith Blinked away, just a moment before the floor he had been standing on melted.

The fight had just turned into a deadly game of tag.

## Chapter 318 Reunion Part 1

Valesa Nalear had gained the upper hand, yet she couldn't stop cursing her eternal bad luck. Lith had yet to die, she had no idea if her plot against Constable Ernas succeeded, and it was only a matter of time before the academy's power core rebooted.

When that happened, the Warp Gates leading to the White Griffon would open again, allowing the royal forces to restore order. Nalear needed to make sure that by then the stage was perfect. Not a single detail could be overlooked or her death would be as slow as agonizing.

She was way behind schedule and the time at her disposal was quickly running out. Blinking consumed a lot of mana, but it was nothing compared to Final Sunset. She had already used Invigoration a lot of times.

To heal from the poison, from the damage she had exchanged with Lith, and lastly from Farg. She needed to eat and rest soon, otherwise she was bound to collapse. The raw amount of mana she was handling put a heavy burden on her body.

Lith was in her same boat, but his situation was even worse. His body had still to fully recover after he consumed so much life force to save Protector. To make things worse, he had spent the last night being tortured and his core was weaker than Nalear's to begin with.

Lith timed his Blinks with extreme precision, leaving behind darkness blasts whenever Nalear closed in. Another weak spot of her tactic that he had found, was that Blink's dimensional door would always appear very close to the mage.

It meant that a huge part of the sphere Final Sunset created was temporarily cut off until the spell reformed it. By leaving his spells near Nalear's exit points, Lith was sure he was chipping her strength bit by bit.

Even with Solus's help, it was still a mammoth task.

'Damn, if it keeps up like this I'm bound to lose. She knows even true dimensional magic, so while she can use Invigoration, I'm forced to keep moving to avoid getting incinerated and prepping my traps. Any idea, Solus?'

'None.' She snarled. 'We can't leave the sword in front of the exit point. She always keeps a fire spike in front of her before Blinking. The sword would be thrown away and I would take heavy damage.'

Lith nodded. He preferred to attempt to escape rather than putting Solus's life to risk.

'I can't believe there is only us fighting. Where is everyone?' For the first time since he started the academy, Lith wished for his companions to be by his side.

He needed only an opening to turn tables, but until he was alone, Nalear could focus on him. She was doing a damn fine job getting closer and closer. In a corner of his mind, Lith was afraid he had failed to prevent the vision from coming true.

Another exit point appeared in front of him. Lith was about to leave another Darkness bomb when Solus warned him.

'Behind you!' Thanks to being temporarily fused, he could actually use all of Solus's senses as his own. The warning was unnecessary, she did it only out of habit. A second exit point was forming at his back almost at the same time. Lith had no idea which was the real one.

If he picked the wrong direction to Blink, it would have been like throwing himself in the maws of the beast.

Darkness imbued flames came out from both dimensional doors at the same time, engulfing both ends of the corridors without leaving him no way out.

'F\*ck, that's not Blink. She actually opened two Warp Steps at once. How powerful is she?' Lith inwardly cursed while their minds were spinning at top gear for a solution.

Alas, there was none. His line of sight was blocked by the flames and there was no one alive and close enough he could use as a benchmark for Blinking.

At least until Solus's mana sense spotted human figures closing in. They were still far, Blinking there was a big risk. The dimensional jump would take a huge toll on him and Lith could find himself surrounded by Nalear's puppets before having the time to react.

'In for a penny, in for a pound. "Maybe dead" always beats "dead as a doornail".'

Lith used most of his remaining energies for the farthest Blink he had ever attempted. Bending the fake spell limits put a huge strain on his mana and willpower, almost making him faint from the extortion.

Luckily, he found himself among friends. To find Nalear, the Ernas had moved towards the battle that produced the most noise. They had encountered and neutralized a few Professors before spotting Lith from a distance.

"Beware of her." Lith was wheezing, he was almost out of breath. The fresh air rejuvenated his lungs and reminded him how bad his throat was after being so close to a miniature sun for too long.

"She can silently cast any spell." He said while looking Phloria in the eyes. Seeing her alive made him happy beyond what words could express. Not seeing the other three sent a cold shiver down his spine, hence he warned his new allies at once.

Lith was risking to expose part of his secrets, but if he didn't, they wouldn't last long and neither would he. Just like the wyvern, Nalear was an opponent he couldn't face alone. The gap between the two of them was too big.

Phloria was brimming with joy too. She was starting to fear it was too late. That just like Yurial, Lith was lost to her. The relief she noticed when their eyes met told Phloria how worried about her he had been.

Jirni and Orion were surprised by finding him in such good shape after fighting an academy's Professor. Normally they would consider his words just a bunch of nonsense coming from a traumatized student.

An enemy capable of perfect silent casting outside first magic was more than unbelievable, it was something out of a nightmare. Yet they knew Lith better.

Even if what he said was absurd, it had to be the truth.

"Thanks, kid. Don't worry too much, in such an enclosed space most of her War Mage spells are useless. Also, Mage Knights are the natural counter to Battle Mages and I'm a Spellbreaker

Orion didn't believe much in his own words. Hunting down mages usually required a team of professionals, while his party was formed by two students and a non mage. As much as a formidable opponent Jirni was, she needed to get close first.

"Drink potions." Lith said to protect them from Nalear's first magic. He could see she had spotted them and he had barely regained two Invigoration breaths worth of energy.

"Thanks, but it's not our first job, Lith." The Ernas gulped down an oddly colored potion each. Lith could see their bodies brimming with mana.

Orion unsheathed his sword while his free hand composed the signs for a tier five spell at unbelievable speed. He had recognized Final Sunset's dark flames and knew how to stop it.

## Chapter 319 Reunion Part 2

Nalear walked slowly towards them, cursing at her bad luck. Quylla had failed, constable Ernas was still alive. In the face of so many opponents, Blink was a liability. Nalear needed to save as much of her strength as she could to make sure they couldn't escape.

Orion completed his spell. He conjured five shields made of ice, each one almost as big as the corridor was wide, that converged on Nalear from above and all the four sides.

'Fighting fire with ice is beyond dumb.' Nalear thought. 'As long I have mana, I can fuel my flames, melting his toys way before they can harm me.'

Much to her surprise, the shields' aim wasn't to hit. A Mage Knight was mostly a defender, they would attack only at close quarters once the enemy left them no choice. The shields grew in size and thickness according to Orion will.

Their edges merged, keeping themselves away from the Final Sunset spell's core while creating an air tight space. It was Orion's personal spell, Sealing Cube. Nalear's flames roared trying to consume the ice restricting them, only to disappear into nothingness.

'The stronger the fire, the more air it consumes.' Orion thought. 'Take away the air and a fire mage becomes helpless.'

Final Sunset failing her shocked Nalear, but not as much as finding herself suddenly gasping for air. The oxygen inside the cube wasn't even enough to sustain a candle, let alone the deep breaths Invigoration required.

Her vision became blurry, but she managed to activate the powers of her iron glove again, shattering her prison with a series of powerful shockwaves. Her freedom came at a heavy price, making it a hollow victory.

All the mana she had poured in Final Sunset was lost, Invigoration was broken, and she was coming dangerously close to exhausting her magical equipment. No matter how powerful the mana crystals were, they still needed some time to recharge and Nalear had been forced using the non stop.

To make things worse, Orion had devised Sealing Cube to implode rather than explode when subjected to extreme vibrations. Air and fire were the natural counters to ice, so he had made them their own worst enemy.

Nalear screamed in pain. Her body was pierced by countless ice shards, bleeding profusely. There was only so much damage her Professor robe could block. She activated her sword again, releasing a flurry of lightning to buy some time and recover.

Jirni had seen countless cornered magicians and outlived them all. As soon as she recognized the crackling sound, she struck four of her needles in the four corners of the corridor, channeling her own air magic inside them.

The needles were indeed one of Orion's best works. They acted as lightning rods, turning Nalear's desperation move into a fool's errand. The electricity was safely grounded, allowing Orion to cast his next spell while Phloria took the offensive.

She charged forward, keeping the enemy's attention on herself to buy her father the time he needed. Nalear was still catching her breath, her spell wasn't ready yet.

She moved her blade pretending she was going to execute a horizontal slash, while she used the momentum from her spin to lunge forward with her sword, adding it to the boost air and fire fusion granted her.

Phloria's swordsmanship was better, allowing her to read the enemy feint and dodged the blade by a hair, turning her body so that her back was against Nalear's chest. Phloria's right arm wrapped around Nalear's locking it in place.

Phloria switched her blade to her left hand, cutting off Nalear's right hand in one fluid movement. The agony didn't stop the traitorous Professor from striking her with the iron glove in the back with the strength of a charging bull.

Phloria was sent flying for several meters. She managed to remain conscious only thanks to her willpower and the powerful potion she had ingested earlier. Orion and Jirni were flabbergasted when they saw Nalear's severed hand go back into place, reattaching itself like nothing had happened.

Lith knew that it was thanks to spirit magic and Invigoration, just like he knew that her hand was far from being really useful. He had almost regained enough strength for a final attack.

Jirni rushed towards Nalear, fast enough to allow her to run on the sidewall while her needles returned to her hand on their own. They assembled together to the rest of the set, shapeshifting into a spear.

Jirni wasn't a mage, she needed all the range advantage she could get to keep enough distance to predict and evade the enemy's spells. She lunged it at Nalear's eye, to take her out in one blow.

Nalear didn't have enough strength in her left arm, so she was forced to use spirit magic to support her blade and deflect the attack. Phloria used that moment of distraction to Blink behind her back, her blade easily pierced through the Professor robe and her hardened skin alike.

Nalear managed to dodge at the last second, turning a fatal blow to the heart to one at her shoulder. Her right hand was still useless, her left arm fell limp, but she was still alive.

She roared in fury, unleashing a tier five spell while Orion did the same.

Nalear's Thunderdome was capable of trapping the surrounding enemies into a thick cover of lightning imbued ice. Unlike a normal thunder, it couldn't be avoided and continued to inflict damage until all the ice wasn't disposed of.

The cold surface formed a closed circuit that would allow the electricity to strike over and over until the enemy wasn't turned into charcoal.

Orion's Nether Seal was an hexaelemental sphere that enveloped the opponent greatly reducing the area of effect of their spells. It required a precise timing and concentration.

It was a static spell, hence if cast too soon the enemy could simply move to avoid it. Too late and it would be useless.

That was the reason Orion didn't cast it even after completing the chant. He had only one chance and had to make it count. Nether Seal blocked Thunderdome, restricting it to barely one meter radius.

Jirni and Phloria needed a single backstep to get to safety.

"Why don't you just die?" Nalear felt she was going insane. As in, even more than she already was.

### Chapter 320 Final Struggle Part 1

Never before someone had fought his battles. In all his three lives, Derek McCoy AKA Lith had always been on the frontlines, be it to protect his brother Carl from his father or working his a\*s off to give his sisters some meat and bread.

Sitting limply in a corner was a new experience for him. It moved something inside the rotten heart of his. In a way, the Ernas where the family he had always dreamed to have when he was a little child.

Super powered beings that fought the bad guys together, no matter the odds. Spectating their battle almost made him feel like he had found somewhere he belonged.

Almost.

What really amazed him was how quickly everything was happening. He and Solus barely had the time to appreciate Orion's strategic prowess, Jirni's amazing reaction speed, or Phloria's swordsmanship that the combat had already shifted from one side to another.

'F\*ck. In those damn action movies, the actors dance with bad guys for minutes, while I only got four breaths worth of energy since the fighting started.' Lith knew that in such a short time frame Nalear couldn't have lost much of her strength.

She was an Awakened with a lot of mana and a deranged mind. He knew all too well what kind of nightmare she could unleash if she was given the slightest chance. Lith knew because he was one as well.

"Why don't you just die?"

Nalear's scream was his cue. That and the blue aura that enveloped her body like a blazing flame. Lith quickly stood up, weaving several spells at once while imbuing the Gatekeeper with part of his strength.

He was ready, yet he didn't move. Orion had reminded him of the importance of timing and precision against a superior opponent. Instead of charging blindly like a bull, Lith choose to wait for his opportunity to appear.

They had the situation under control, so he kept chanting while using Solus's senses to not miss a single detail. The information she could get by spending her mana was overwhelming.

The slight alteration in the room temperature, the mana density, and even things like neural pathways flaring up whenever someone was about to do something. Lith had no idea what most of it meant and neither did Solus.

The only thing he was certain of, was that if they weren't one, with Solus acting both as a source and as a filter, all that information would have burned his brain.

Nalear tried to snap Jirni's neck with spirit magic, but the mana running through her veins thanks to the potion reduced the pressure to an itch. Cursing Constable Ernas once again, Nalear unleashed a spirit magic blast by making her aura detonate.

It didn't inflict damage. It was just a very strong push, yet being invisible it took Jirni and Phloria by surprise, giving Nalear a moment to catch her breath.

Or at least so she hoped. Lith was already in front of her, releasing five different tier three spells, each one aimed at a different body part. Nalear was still weaving her next spell while drawing a deep breath. She had no time to move nor hidden card to play.

She used spirit magic on herself, moving her body as a puppet and raising her left arm in the nick of time. The iron glove emitted another series of shockwaves, blasting away Lith's spells before proceeding to do the same with him.

Nalear realized too late that a similar thing had happened earlier. Lith falling for the same trick twice was unlikely.

Indeed it was.

Lith released his sixth spell, conjuring a concave ice wall in front of himself. It was just a regular ice wall with a different shape, but Lith hoped it would be enough. Orion had shown him how the shockwaves were just sound.

Lith's plan was to weaken them with the five spells first and then bounce them back to the sender with the thick ice wall reinforced by Solus's spirit magic. It was an improvised spell born out of sudden inspiration, so even when it only partially succeeded, Lith still considered it a success.

The wall reflected only half of the shockwaves' strength while the other half struck Lith. Both the Awakened ones were sent flying, but only one of them had allies. The hit broke Nalear's focus disrupting her spell and breathing technique alike.

Phloria didn't miss the opportunity. She activated Blast Guard, a Mage Knight tier four spell that burned Nalear's back, bouncing her toward Jirni like a pinball. Jirni took out her Gatekeeper short sword, imbuing it with air magic to enhance its edge.

Even while moving at high speed, Nalear managed to alter her trajectory with spirit magic enough to avoid Jirni chopping off her head. Lady Ernas reacted in time, adjusting the angle of her slash, opening a deep cut in Nalear's side as consolation prize.

Nalear gritted her teeth, holding back tears of desperation.

'If I'm really going to die, I will take you all down with me.' She thought.

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"When is he going to transform?" Milea asked.

"Transform?" The Guardians asked as one.

"Didn't you all come here to understand what he is? If there isn't going to be a world tribulation, what's the point of staying here?"

"Kid, if every time someone fights for their life a world tribulation started, there would be only Guardians left alive on Mogar." Salaark guffawed.

"We can study him from this distance even without a tribulation." Leegaain offered her his hand, which Milea took without hesitation. Thanks to that contact, she was able to share the Guardian's Soul Vision.

It showed her the real nature of things. The Guardians appeared in their true forms, humongous mass of power in the form of a Griffon, a Phoenix, and a Dragon. Each one of them was so big their heads seemed to reach the sky and their feet Mogar's core.

The White Griffon academy looked like a kneeling white knight, wounded all over. Their pristine armor was tainted by the red of blood and the black of death.

Lith was fully transformed in her eyes and so was Nalear. He was now over two meters tall (7 feet) and covered by black scales the tip of which was bright red from the scorching heat that coursed through them.

Two curved horns resided on his featureless head, together with seven yellow eyes and a maw opened in a cruel smile that revealed the fire burning within. Two pairs of upside down membranous wings came out of his back, as well as a long tail ending in several bone blades.

Nalear looked like herself, but she was wearing a long white tunic dirty with blood and mud. Her hair moved like she was in the middle of a storm, her eye sockets were empty black holes, shedding tears of blood while her mouth was wide open in an eternal silent scream.

"Teacher, he really looks like one of your humanoid forms, but her... Isn't that a banshee? Is she going to evolve into an undead Guardian?" Milea had no other explanation to such a vision.

Orion and Phloria appeared no different from their human form, while Jirni's skin appeared grey. Blood was constantly dripping from her hands.